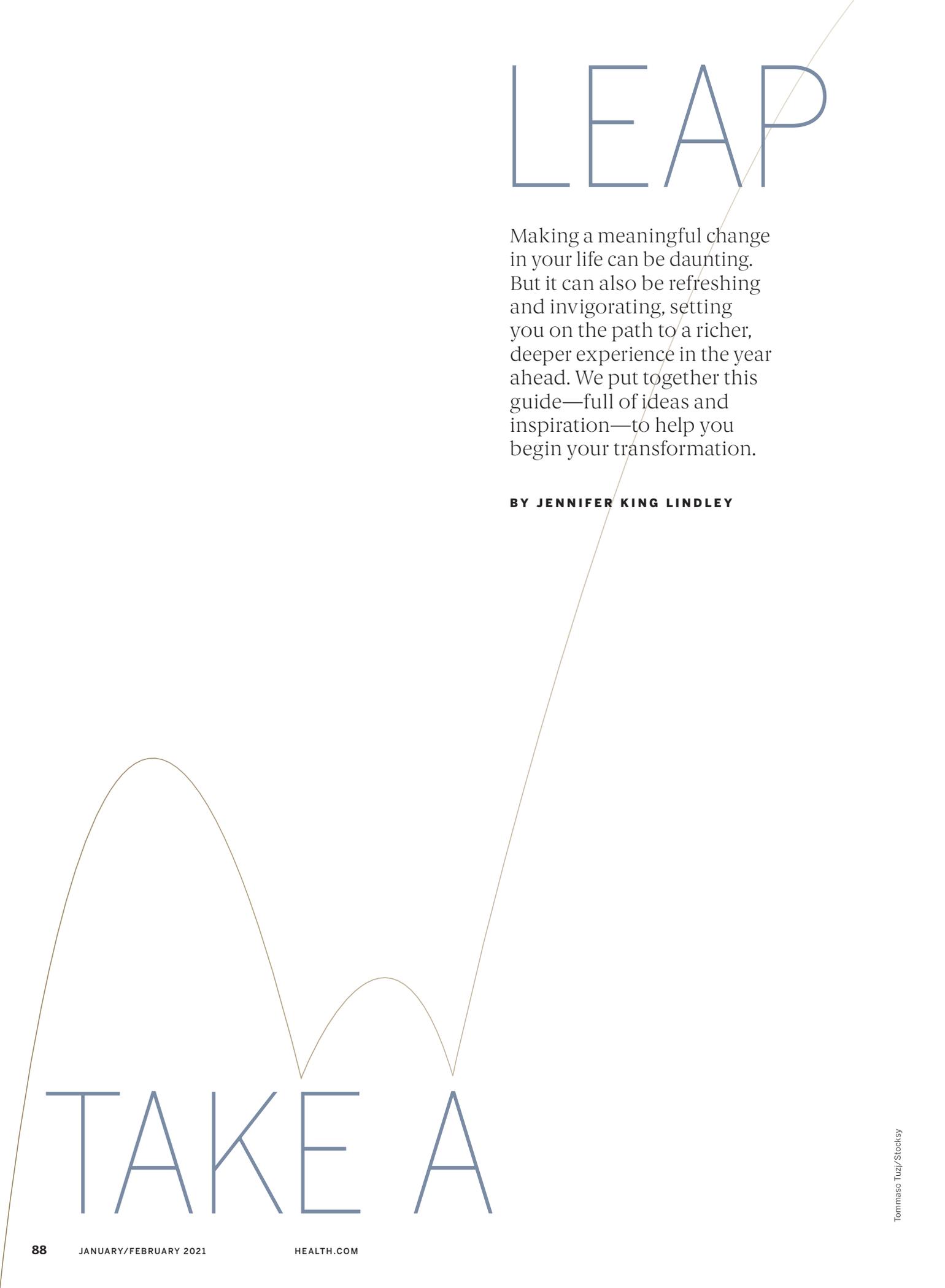


LEAP

Making a meaningful change in your life can be daunting. But it can also be refreshing and invigorating, setting you on the path to a richer, deeper experience in the year ahead. We put together this guide—full of ideas and inspiration—to help you begin your transformation.

BY JENNIFER KING LINDLEY



TAKE A



How to... PRIORITIZE YOUR WELL-BEING

Soak up this insight and advice from Ebony Butler, PhD, psychologist, food relationship strategist, and host of *The Food Is Not BAE* podcast.

Why do women have such a hard time with self-care? My clients often say, “But I have to do all the work things, the mom things, the wife things.” Everyone else’s needs come first. I work with women to help them realize they are worthy of good care too. You can’t show up for others if you don’t show up

for yourself. You wouldn’t give someone a burned-out candle as a gift. That is all we offer of ourselves if we get too depleted.

Have you struggled with this yourself? As a Black woman, the idea that we are supposed to do for others is ingrained over generations. My mother took care of other people for a living, as did her mother. There’s the stereotype of the mammy, the matriarch—the one who looks after everybody else. This becomes expected of Black women, and sometimes you internalize that message. It goes deep.

So where do we begin to change? It takes a mindset shift, a decision to make yourself a priority now and not wait for some perfect time in the future. A perfect time never comes. Choose the lowest-hanging fruit: It might be packing yourself healthier lunches, or going for a walk each evening. When you start with small wins, you gain confidence. You realize the world around you still functions.

What should be some top priorities in everyone’s self-care? From good sleep flows everything: your mood, your appetite, your energy. I make sure to get in seven hours. Sometimes I have to tell myself, “Forget the dirty dishes. Rest is more important.” I also encourage clients to add more nutritious food to their diet. We have long focused on “bad” foods to restrict—that approach hasn’t worked and has messed up our relationship with food. Instead, ask yourself, “How can I add more vegetables to my plate? How can I shop for whole foods?” You feel more control. Over time, these nutritious choices will naturally crowd out other things.

What happens if—OK, when—we blow it? Treat yourself with grace and compassion. If you binge on Netflix and chips instead of going to the gym, recognize that this isn’t the end of the world. Then, ask yourself, “What are the things that got in the way of me doing what I intended to do?” Take note without judgment. Adjust your plan for tomorrow. Guilt and shame just hold you back.



TRUE
STORY

“I Did a 180”

When I started making my own wine at home in 2014, my friends and family kept saying, “This is really good. Would you ever make it into a career?” I had a successful career in human resources, but wine was my passion. I started taking classes in chemistry and winemaking, and got my master’s degree in agribusiness. Once I had all that preparation under my belt, I felt ready to get Jenny Dawn Cellars, the first urban winery in Wichita, Kansas, off the ground. There were challenges. I had to talk to nine different banks to get a loan and speak to hundreds of investors before five came aboard. As the first African American woman winemaker in Kansas, I also felt a lot of racism and discrimination. I’ve been very discouraged at different points of my journey, but early on, I got a tattoo on my wrist that reads: “Have faith, never give up.” Seeing it every day kept me inspired. So did feeling like my business is bigger than me. There’s a lack of diversity in the wine industry, and I want to open doors for others. —Jennifer McDonald, 38, as told to Stephanie Booth



TRUE
STORY

“I Downsized. Way Down.”

I used to work 60 to 100 hours each week in my corporate finance job, but I wasn't taking care of myself. When I learned at a routine checkup that I was borderline for diabetes, heart issues, high cholesterol, and high blood pressure, I realized I needed a lot less stress in my life. Within two months, I put my house up for sale, bought a 26-foot RV, and sold everything I owned. I was scared of the unknown, of camping by myself—even that my new RV would break down and leave me stranded. But I kept telling myself, “On the other side of fear is your greatest reward.” Three years later, I've happily traveled to 33 states, Canada, and Mexico and have no end in sight. I now mentor others on how to finance a full-time travel lifestyle and start an online business on the road. It's easy to get overwhelmed when you feel your dream is too big. But when you break it down into steps, it becomes doable.

—Amber Baldwin, 49, as told to SB

How to... MAKE OVER YOUR SELF-ESTEEM

Everyone has insecurities, says Joyce Marter, LCPC, founder of Urban Balance, a national counseling practice. “Once we recognize the voice of our inner critic, we can learn to talk to ourselves in a different way.” Here, she gives guidance for negotiating a few familiar hang-ups.

You feel down when you hear about someone else's “perfect” life. If there is one thing I've learned from being a therapist for two decades, it is that we all have our problems, even people who look outwardly like they have it all. So stay in your lane. Reflect on your wins. What have you done recently that you are proud of? Embrace the abundance theory—your friend obtaining success doesn't mean you will have less of it. There's plenty to go around.

You belittle your accomplishments. We have a hard time acknowledging our successes. We feel like we have to apologize for them so

that other people don't feel threatened. We say things like, “They only promoted me because I hung around so long.” But you are not honoring yourself, and you're teaching other people to think less of you. Next time you receive a compliment, look the person in the eye, smile, and simply say, “Thank you. I am happy too!” Revel in the moment. It gets easier with practice.

You nitpick your body in the mirror. Instead of scowling at your cellulite, develop the habit of practicing gratitude for all your body does for you. For example, maybe you think, “I don't love my midsection, but when I look at it, I'm reminded where my two beautiful daughters grew. How amazing is that!” You might thank your feet for carrying you

through your first-ever 5K. And your eyes for allowing you to watch the sunrise.

You beat yourself up over small mistakes. Ask yourself how you would talk to a friend who did the same thing. You would be empathetic and supportive. Speak to yourself that same way. For example, if you forget about an appointment, you might say, “Everyone has done that! Don't be so hard on yourself. How about you set a reminder on your phone so you don't make the same mistake again?”

How to... RECOMMIT TO YOUR FRIENDSHIPS

Our pals often fall to the bottom of a winding to-do list. But “research shows that friendships are actually the relationships that bring us the most undiluted joy,” says psychologist and friendship expert Marisa G. Franco, PhD. Here are some ways you can bolster your connections, ranging from easy to intense (but so worth it).

Try “repotting.” Maybe you have a colleague you’d like to become better friends with. “Just as with a plant, change the ‘pot’ to give you room for friendship to grow,” says Franco. Find a different setting to spend time together. Ask if she wants to check out a sculpture garden or the new coffee place. You’ll see a different side of each other, a first step toward a deeper relationship.

Schedule an ongoing activity. A standing date on your calendar builds buddy time into your routine. “I created a wellness group with a group of friends,” says Franco. They met weekly to do things like meditate and hike together. “Seeing each other so regularly really boosted our connection.” If time is tight, multitask. You can grocery shop or walk your dogs, and catch up at the same time.

Keep it fresh. With old friends, you can fall in a too-comfy rut—“Let’s have lunch!” (Repeat.) Make a point to try new things, too, says Rachel Wilkerson Miller, author of *The Art of Showing Up: How to Be There for Yourself and Your People*. “It can be as simple as, ‘Let’s read the same book and discuss it, or make a new dessert.’” (Both suggestions lend themselves well to Zoom, too.)

Catch the details. In our buzzing 5G world, attention is getting scarcer, yet it’s what we crave from others. When you really listen to a friend, it’ll bring you closer. Wilkerson Miller has an old-school suggestion: Take notes. Jot down the addictive podcast she recommends, the name of her weird boss, when her family will be visiting. “We think we will naturally remember all this stuff, but we usually don’t,” says Wilkerson Miller. Next time you see your friend, tell her your thoughts about that podcast. “Your notes can also serve as a snapshot of your friendship at the moment, which is really nice.”

Show vulnerability. Nothing cements a friendship more than being present when the other person needs you. Stop by with a thermos of tea and open ears at the end of a hard day. Send a supportive text before a nerve-racking interview. Be sure to reach out to pals when you are struggling, too. “Asking for support from others communicates ‘I trust you; I feel close to you,’” says Franco. “It is strong glue. We overestimate the risk of being vulnerable and underestimate its rewards.”



TRUE
STORY

“I Stopped Hiding My Mental Illness”

I’ve had major depression and suicidal thoughts since I was a child. For years, I didn’t share my mental illness with anyone. I didn’t want to burden my family and was fearful of how others would view me. Not until after college did I finally open up to a few friends. I trusted my gut that it was OK to be vulnerable with them—and it was. My Latinx friends shared their own experiences, which helped me decide to become a mental health activist. To show more diversity in images of mental illness, I created the People of Color & Mental Illness Photo Project. I asked people to submit a selfie, including a sign that expressed something about their mental health. When that request was met with a lot of apprehension, I decided to publicly share my own photo. My sign read: “My name is Dior Vargas, and I have major depressive disorder.” Being honest felt freeing and encouraged more than 100 others to become part of the project. We all deserve to be open—and compassionate—about our struggles. When we do, we become better advocates for ourselves and others. —Dior Vargas, 33, as told to SB

TRUE
STORY



“I Went From Yo-Yo Dieting to Personal Trainer”

When I was 22, a doctor I consulted about a breast reduction told me I needed to lose 70 pounds. I made a few attempts to take off the weight, but it always came back. Then, in 2010, while preparing for the bar exam, I decided on a plan: During my 10 weeks of studying, I'd walk 30 minutes each day. It became a part of my daily routine that I no longer had to think about. The weight started coming off, which gave me the confidence to join a YMCA and start doing kickboxing and cardio strength training. Each class was 45 minutes of loud music, fun, and stress relief, and I loved the sense of community. So many people asked me for help with their own fitness that I became certified as a personal trainer as well as a lawyer—which I never would have imagined all those years ago. Getting fit isn't a quick fix. It's a lifestyle change. Long-term change first starts mentally within you.

—DeAnna Taylor, 36, as told to SB

How to... SPARK CHANGE IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Itching to find a way to give back and help out your neighbors? Keep these tips in mind as you embark upon your mission.

Get centered. Anger may have been what catapulted you into action. “But that is not a sustainable motivation. It leads to burnout and feeling overwhelmed,” says Monica Bourgeau, author of *The Change Code: A Practical Guide to Making a Difference in a Polarized World*. “People stick with what makes them feel good. Can you reframe manning the phone bank as an act of service and love?”

Add some accountability. “Make your intention public by telling a friend what you're going to do,” advises Hahrie Han, PhD, a professor of political science and director of the SNF Agora Institute at Johns Hopkins University.

Start somewhere. The first step is the hardest, says Bourgeau. Push beyond good intentions, and commit to doing one small thing in the next 24 hours. “If you are worried about hunger, make a list of local food banks you might volunteer at,” she suggests. “Small actions build to big ones.”

Have Insta impact. Too often, social media is used to inflame. But it can be used to inspire, too. The #Trashtag trend is a great example, says Bourgeau: “Individuals post before and after photos of small areas of beaches, rivers, and parks they cleaned up. Sharing your experience shows what just one person can do.”

Find your peeps. Sending a check or signing a petition certainly helps, but bonding with a group of people working on the same cause is the secret sauce of political

change, Han's research has found. Those relationships keep you committed over the long haul. If you want to help with homelessness in your city, say, find out who the local leaders are and get to know them, suggests Han. “You will draw energy from each other. Working with others makes the whole greater than the sum of its parts.” ✖